



TYSONS
LAND USE TASK FORCE
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons

TRANSFORMING TYSONS



**Overview of Tysons Land Use
Task Force Recommendations**
September 2008

This document provides an overview of the recommendations of the Tysons Land Use Task Force with regard to revising the comprehensive plan for Tysons Corner Virginia. The full report of recommendations and other materials associated with the Task Force process can be found at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/tysonscorner.

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A Vision for the Future of Tysons

Imagine a Tysons Corner built for people, not cars. Imagine an urban center where growth pays for an infrastructure that provides needed public services and amenities and promotes environmental excellence. The new Tysons will provide a rich mix of uses within walking distance of transit, offer workforce housing, include opportunities for arts, culture and recreation, reduce sprawl, and protect existing neighborhoods.

Using the principles of transit-oriented development, the Tysons Land Use Task Force has established just such a long-term community vision for the future of Tysons along with the detailed recommendations necessary for its successful implementation.

These recommendations describe a transformed Tysons – from a textbook case of suburban sprawl into a true 21st century urban center that addresses the challenges of sustainable growth, energy conservation, environmental protection, affordable housing, and safe communities.

The four Metrorail stations, to be built in Tysons as part of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail project, will serve as a catalyst for this transformation. The proven strengths of transit-oriented design will allow the future Tysons to become a livable and vibrant urban center where people live, work, play, shop, worship, and even retire. Significant changes will include:

...a true 21st century urban center that addresses the challenges of sustainable growth, energy conservation, environmental protection, affordable housing, and safe communities.

- A dramatic increase in housing at different income levels to create a balance of residents and workers
- Eight pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods of mixed use development
- Taller buildings and higher densities near Metrorail tapering to lower densities at the borders with surrounding neighborhoods
- Extensive venues and opportunities for arts, culture, and recreation
- Less overall parking, with much of it placed underground
- More local streets which invite and protect pedestrians with sidewalks, trees, street level retail, and facilities for bicycles
- Efficient and frequent transit to rapidly move people throughout Tysons
- Route 7 and Route 123 serving as tree-lined boulevards to calm traffic while still allowing it to move through Tysons
- New buildings constructed to green standards
- New open spaces and parks connecting people and neighborhoods.

This is a long-term vision that will result in a complete transformation from Tysons as we know it today. These changes will take decades to achieve, and will require strong political will. It will also require a plan and structure for implementation fundamentally different from what has been done in the past. The public and private sectors must work together to ensure that all facets of the desired vision are implemented.

To achieve the vision, the Task Force recommends that the County create mechanism(s) to ensure that the level of development necessary to create the overall urban environment being sought is carefully timed and coordinated with the infrastructure and amenities necessary for a well functioning “downtown” for Fairfax County.

Tysons Today

Over the past 40 years, Tysons has grown from a simple country crossroads to the nation’s 12th largest employment center and among its largest retail centers. It provides the largest tax base in Fairfax County and is a major economic force in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The home page of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority’s web site notes that:

- *Time* magazine proclaimed Fairfax County “one of the great economic success stories of our time.”
- A U.S. Labor Department study called Fairfax County the private-sector jobs leader in the Washington, D.C. area.
- A *Wall Street Journal* story described Fairfax County as the center of federal government contracting.

Fairfax County is the heart of the Washington area technology community and Tysons is its economic and employment center.

Tysons is home to three Fortune 500 headquarters and many prominent national firms.

Tysons is home to three Fortune 500 headquarters and many prominent national firms. It is also one of the largest retail centers in the region with almost six million square feet of space and two major regional malls. The Tysons area also has 26 million square feet of office space, more than one million square feet of industrial/flex space, and its 14 hotels are the largest concentration in the county. According to the Fairfax County Department of Tax Administration, annual county tax revenue from Tysons – generated primarily from commercial real estate and sales taxes – is approximately \$300 million. The transformed Tysons, using the growth anticipated in the Task Force recommendations and consistent with market projections, will generate more than \$1 billion per year under today’s tax rates.

The Challenge: Moving Tysons Into the 21st Century

Today’s Tysons is built for the automobile. With 167,000 parking spaces covering 40 million square feet, it has more real estate devoted to cars than people, and more parking spaces than its 17,000 residents and 105,000 workers combined. Its large superblocks and campus-style development are accompanied by widely separated buildings, limited safe and useful pedestrian walkways, and roadways that can be highly congested at times. Residents frequently point to the limited availability of grocery stores and personal services among the myriad shops, and the impacts of poorly managed growth on neighboring residential communities as significant concerns.

Tysons' auto domination is out of step with the energy conservation and environmental consciousness that is important to today's society. With nearly half the land area covered by impermeable surfaces, there are few usable green spaces or parks, and serious challenges managing stormwater.

Traffic and pedestrian safety are also serious concerns. Route 7 and portions of Route 123 are highly congested thoroughfares practically un-crossable by foot or bicycle, and few comfortable connections exist. As a result, a majority of trips, even those within easy walking distance, are made in cars and most end up on the major roadways due to an inadequate network of well connected minor streets.

Tysons simply cannot move forward under its existing suburban development model.

The arterial barriers represented by the Beltway and the Dulles Toll Road, as well as significant traffic passing through Tysons to other destinations further divide Tysons.

As it contemplated these challenges, the Task Force came to the clear realization that Tysons simply cannot move forward under its existing suburban development model. Instead, Tysons must transform into the urban downtown of Fairfax County if it is to play a central role in accommodating the 1.6 million people projected to come to the metropolitan Washington area by the year 2030. (*Source: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Round 7.1 projections.*)

The Opportunity: Metrorail in Tysons

With the finalization of plans to place four stations within Tysons as part of the Metrorail extension to Dulles Airport and Loudoun County, Fairfax County was presented with an opportunity to dramatically change and improve Tysons.

While the 1994 Comprehensive Plan had identified three potential Metrorail stations, it failed to fully recognize the urban nature of the future Tysons or to take full advantage of a transit-based approach to planning. Today, after a decade of subsequent and continual piecemeal growth under the 1994 Plan (without the presence of Metrorail), it is clear why little of Tysons' potential has been realized.

Throughout its process, the Task Force has heard from many who were disappointed with the implementation of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan. It contained many good ideas, sound objectives and important policies, but few of them were implemented. It clearly was time for both a new plan and a new approach to implementation.

The Response: Engaging the Community and Planners Together

In May 2005, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognized that “Tysons Corner is the economic engine driving Fairfax County to and through the 21st Century, and the conditions established by this Comprehensive Plan update must continue to foster the economic vitality of our urban center.” In response, the Board appointed a Task Force of stakeholders and citizens to update the 1994 plan in order to achieve the following:

1. Promote more mixed use;
2. Better facilitate transit-oriented development (TOD);
3. Enhance pedestrian connections throughout Tysons;
4. Increase the residential component of the density mix;
5. Improve the functionality of Tysons; and;
6. Provide for amenities and aesthetics in Tysons, such as public spaces, public art, parks, etc.

(Source: Joint Board Matter dated May 23, 2005, establishing the Task Force’s mission)

The 36 member Task Force represented the wide range of community interests and perspectives essential to planning for the future of Tysons. The Task Force sought help both locally and nationally as they deliberated. The process included extensive support from Fairfax County planning and transportation staffs. In addition, expert planning, transportation, and public participation professionals from around the country were engaged in an in-depth process to design a new Tysons around transit and to ensure that the community’s voice was heard and incorporated.

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The Task Force worked closely with over a dozen public and private agencies, organizations, and utility providers responsible for managing and maintaining the services and infrastructure necessary for Tysons. Meetings and presentations were conducted with the many state and regional authorities responsible for transportation-related changes in Tysons including, but not limited to, the Virginia Department of Transportation, Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, and High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes Project.

The Task Force studied the issues and conditions in Tysons extensively, and looked at examples of how transit-oriented communities have been designed and implemented in areas throughout the country. Experts from around the country were invited to provide detailed presentations on virtually every aspect of Tysons redevelopment including housing, growth, transit, stormwater management, transportation demand management, and transit-oriented development.

To study information in sufficient detail, the Task Force organized six committees that met regularly, interacted with County staff and relevant experts, and provided detailed recommendations for Task Force review. Committee topics included transportation, affordable and workforce housing, implementation, livability and walkability, landowner coalitions, and communication.

45 public meetings and workshops attended by over 2,000 participants were held to get broader public input.

The Board of Supervisors also directed the Task Force to involve and incorporate the views and concerns of surrounding communities, citizen groups, smart growth advocates, businesses, employees, environmentalists and other special interests, in addition to landowners and developers. The full Task Force held over 60 meetings and held even more meetings among its subcommittees, all of which were open to the public. In addition, 45 public meetings and workshops attended by over 2,000 participants were held to get broader public input. The first meetings were held at the beginning of the process before any actual plans were drafted, and additional meetings and workshops were held at key decision points throughout the process. The Task Force Chair and members also met with individuals and groups throughout the County on a regular basis to share information and gain input.

The County maintained an extensive web site that included summaries and materials from each meeting, all public materials, and videos of presentations from public meetings. On-line input was used to augment public meetings and workshops. Regular emails, fact sheets, and in-depth media coverage also kept the public informed. This broader public input helped to shape the direction of the recommendations from the very beginning.

Timeline of Key Public Participation Events

- In early 2006, 20 meetings were held with hundreds of stakeholders to identify the key values that should be considered in the planning process. A detailed report was prepared and distributed.
- The results of the 20 meetings helped to shape the eight guiding planning principles that directed every aspect of planning. These guiding planning principles were presented for public comment in the summer of 2006 and finalized that fall.
- In spring 2007, the Task Force conducted a series of six hands-on workshops to get input on potential growth patterns in a future Tysons. Additional meetings were held in conjunction with area employers to get the input of commuting employees who were less likely to attend workshops.
- Three workshops were conducted in summer 2007 to get additional public input on the desired characteristics for a future Tysons. Additional meetings were conducted for area employees. Also, web-based input was conducted for those unable to attend the workshops. The results of these meetings and workshops were used directly in the development of two prototypes to be used in evaluating possible futures for Tysons.
- In the fall and winter of 2007, the Task Force sponsored a series of educational workshops, bringing in noted experts from around the region and the country on issues of transit-oriented design, density, and implementation.

Timeline of Key Public Participation Events (continued)

- In early 2008, a final set of workshops was conducted to get public input to the design prototypes. Additional meetings were held for area employees and on-line input was also sought. This information was used to help the Task Force develop its recommendations.
- In addition to these scheduled workshops and seminars, dozens of meetings were conducted with major homeowners associations and other groups throughout the area to provide briefings, updates, and responses to questions.
- Over the course of three and one-half years, the Task Force has met at least twice per month. All Task Force meetings, including those of the subcommittees, were open to the public. Meetings featuring topics of special interest held in larger venues to invite public questions and comment. Supervisors and Planning Commissioners participated in and attended the vast majority of Task Force events.

The Task Force has maintained a comprehensive record of its activities and reports at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/tysonscorner.

Achieving the Vision

Early in the planning process, the Task Force realized that Tysons could not simply evolve from its current form. Real success could only come about through a radical transformation, taking place over many years. The Task Force further understood that no transformation was possible without a detailed vision to identify what that long-term future would look like.

In addition, the Task Force recognized that the existing County process of reviewing and approving development proposals on a project-by-project basis would not provide the opportunity to achieve the community's vision for Tysons. A new process was needed to achieve common standards and design objectives that served to integrate projects and implement plan elements across property boundaries. This new process will also facilitate the provision of amenities that will benefit the community as a whole. Thus it was not enough to present the vision. It was also necessary to create a new approach and the tools needed to ensure its realization. An integral part of this approach is to strategically increase densities in order to maximize the benefits of transit, create sustainable, walkable urban environments, and allow Tysons to absorb and manage the growth necessary to maintain its status as the economic engine of Northern Virginia.

The actual form and timing of development will be greatly affected by market conditions, availability of infrastructure, the necessary phasing of development and amenities, and a combination of public and private resources. It will require a high degree of cooperation and coordination among Fairfax County, the Commonwealth of Virginia, residents, landowners, developers, employers, workers, and the surrounding communities.

Recognizing this, the Task Force is presenting to the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission a long-term vision for a completely transformed Tysons that will take several decades to be fully realized.

Over the coming months, detailed district plan language and final area-wide plan language will be drafted by a committee of Task Force members, staff, and consultants. The committee will also recommend necessary implementation techniques, including changes to the zoning ordinance. These products will then be reviewed by the full Task Force and forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Two key elements essential to the future success of Tysons redevelopment are presented in the report.

1) A Clear Framework for Articulating a Long-Term Vision

The Task Force is presenting a vision for Tysons with a number of detailed characteristics that are essential for success. The vision presented will not be realized for many decades but will require a clearly defined framework to ensure its ultimate success. The Task Force has identified key components that must be achieved if Tysons is to become a functional urban center for Fairfax County, effectively managing its share of projected regional growth.

2) An Approach to Comprehensive Planning and Implementation

The Task Force also presents a comprehensive new approach to implementation, designed to create the proper focus on fully realizing the amended plan, providing oversight and coordination of development, and achieving the desired community benefits.

Recommendations: Creating a Framework and Approach for Building the 21st Century Tysons

The Task Force has developed a wide range of recommendations. Creating the recommendations began with building a consensus on the Guiding Planning Principles necessary for implementing effective transit oriented development. These eight Guiding Planning Principles were developed to reflect the key public values identified at public meetings early in the process:

- **Move Tysons forward within its existing boundaries** as the employment and commercial economic engine of the region and an expanding contributor to the tax base of Fairfax County.
- **Retain compatible transitions at the edges to adjacent neighborhoods through** a combination of use, intensity, scale and/or building heights.

- **Transform Tysons from a suburban office park and activity center into a 24/7 urban center** marked by the diversity of residents and workers, a wide range of ideas, opportunities, and activities, the quality of buildings, aesthetics, and open spaces, and connections and accessibility for all.
- **Reduce the time, cost, and inconvenience of accessing and moving within Tysons** by promoting a functional and accessible system of pedestrian walkways, trails, shuttles, bike routes, a grid of streets, transit connections and standard principles of trip reduction.
- **Reduce the suburban focus** on isolated buildings, surface parking and moving vehicles through Tysons to somewhere else and connect new buildings, urban parks, structured parking, and pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to form engaging streetscapes and connected neighborhoods.
- **Attract mixed-use transit-oriented development and private investment** to Metrorail station areas and transit connection locations throughout Tysons, including increased housing supply, choices, and price points, service opportunities, and office space.
- **Engage people, communities, institutions, and the private sector with government** to include in Tysons the distinctive architecture, civic focal points, cultural and educational institutions, places of worship, medical facilities, entertainment and recreation, libraries, and public safety facilities that mark environmentally sound, safe and inclusive urban communities.
- **Respect the unique natural features and topography** of Tysons in all plans, expand useable and publicly accessible open space and improve the existing natural environment.

(Source: Guiding Planning Principles adopted by the Task Force in September 2006.)

The summary of recommendations below represents those items that are essential to future development. While the exact details of each will evolve over time, none can be ignored.

1. Create a People-Focused Urban Setting

Policy Changes Required

- Allow significantly higher densities in TOD areas and along form-giving circulator routes.
- Create urban standards to guide all aspects of Tysons development and implementation.
- Strengthen targets for affordable housing.
- Enhance support for arts, culture and recreation.

Specific Recommendations

- 1a. Envision Tysons as multiple connected neighborhoods.** Eight distinct neighborhoods will emerge, each with its own identity, arts and culture, parks, residences, and jobs. Venues and destinations will be created where people want to spend time in the evenings and on weekends, defining Tysons as a more complete place.
- 1b. Establish a transit-oriented approach to density.** Building densities will be highest within 1/8 mile of Metro stations, with floor area ratios (FAR) of up to 6.0. These densities will decrease as the distance from stations increases, with FARs ranging from 1.75 up to 2.75 beyond 1/3 mile from stations and lower densities in conformance with the current Plan beyond 1/2 mile from stations. In addition, land within 600 feet of form-giving circulator routes will have FARs ranging from 1.5 up to 2.5.
- 1c. Link development intensities to community benefits.** Increased intensity alone will not create livable places. To achieve the highest intensities, new developments will be required to provide a variety of benefits, such as an appropriate mix of uses, contributions to the grid of streets, open space, public art and cultural amenities, environmental enhancements, and affordable and workforce housing. Requirements will vary based on the specific site location and circumstance.
- 1d. Create a balance between jobs and residents.** Jobs could increase from 105,000 today to as many as 200,000 at the end of the planning horizon. The current residential population of 17,000 could increase to 100,000 residents, requiring a considerable increase in housing units to provide a better jobs/housing balance. Giving people the opportunity to live near their workplaces could generate fewer auto trips and result in less traffic congestion.
- 1e. Promote mixed use development with street-level retail.** People will be able to run errands, and find restaurants, entertainment, and shopping all within walking distance of their homes, offices, and transit.
- 1f. Promote the development of affordable and workforce housing.** Incentive-based requirements will extend the County policy for affordable and workforce housing beyond the current 12% to 20% of residential development and allow more people to live close to their work.
- 1g. Apply design guidelines.** Specific and detailed urban guidelines will help to create a sense of place and a vital urban environment.

- 1h. Create accessible urban streetscapes.** Smaller blocks throughout Tysons will provide a focus on pedestrian and bicycle access. The grid of streets will include complete sidewalks that allow people to walk throughout Tysons. Streetscapes will be enhanced by shade trees, pedestrian amenities, and underground utilities.
- 1i. Design community services for an urban environment.** Public safety services, libraries, health care, and recreation facilities will be adapted to serve people quickly and effectively in an urban setting and will be implemented commensurate with growth.
- 1j. Include cultural and educational institutions, public art, and spaces for arts participation and enjoyment.**

2. Redesign the Transportation Network with a Strong Focus on Transit

Policy Changes Required

- Change and transition the current parking requirements to reflect an urban environment and discourage automobile usage.
- Allow for the development of appropriate urban streets.

Specific Recommendations

- 2a. **Create a fine grid of streets.** The current superblocks will be transformed into manageable streets to keep local traffic off major roadways, create more pathways for traffic flow, and provide a safe, accessible pedestrian and bicycle environment.
- 2b. **Use “complete streets” design principles.** Complete streets will be designed to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities will safely move along and across a complete street.
- 2c. **Create extensive bicycle lanes and facilities.** Residents and workers will be able to travel by bicycle on dedicated on-road facilities, making use of bike racks, bike lockers and other facilities at residential, retail, and commercial areas.
- 2d. **Create a system of circulators.** A series of local circulators will move people to and from Metro and within Tysons, including high-frequency routes on dedicated rights of way.
- 2e. **Create neighborhood transit and non-motorized connections.** To supplement the circulator system, local transit, such as bus or trolley, will serve other areas outside of walking distance to Metro or the circulators. People living in surrounding neighborhoods will have the option of using neighborhood transit systems and increased pedestrian and bicycle connections to Tysons.
- 2f. **Plan development to provide access to transit.** The most intense development will occur within walking distance of Metro stations and along the circulator routes and most areas of Tysons will be within walking distance of either a circulator stop or Metro station.
- 2g. **Apply Transportation Demand Management.** TDM strategies will reduce the number of car trips and increase the efficient use of transportation services. These could include transit coordinators, carpool/vanpool incentives, transit subsidies, flex-work arrangements, guaranteed ride home, and parking management.
- 2h. **“Right size” parking.** Urban parking standards will result in less overall parking near Metrorail to encourage the use of other modes of transportation.

3. Place a Strong Focus on the Environment

Policy Changes Required

- Strengthen requirements for green buildings by requiring LEED Silver or equivalent by 2013.
- Develop and implement urban standards for parks.
- Strengthen requirements and introduce new methods for managing stormwater to reduce runoff to that of forested conditions.
- Set goals for reductions in vehicle miles traveled by residents.
- Over the next 25 years, more will be understood regarding the effects of low impact design, LEED construction, enhanced transportation demand management strategies, and the impact of transit oriented design. With this knowledge, additional steps in building design and urban planning can be implemented to achieve the long-term goal for Tysons of carbon neutrality by 2030.

Specific Recommendations

- 3a. Develop and connect parks and green space throughout Tysons.** Many acres of new parkland in restored streams, green spaces, trails, and neighborhood parks, will create a green network throughout Tysons. A large signature park space should be developed to serve as a central gathering space and cultural venue.
- 3b. Require green building standards.** All new buildings in Tysons will be LEED certified or the equivalent. Bonus density will be provided for buildings certified above the base level. After 2013 new buildings will be required to achieve LEED silver certification or the equivalent.
- 3c. Restore existing streams.** Scotts Run, Old Courthouse Branch, and other streams in Tysons will be restored to create spaces for recreation as appropriate, to maintain environmental protection, and to preserve and enhance buffers to surrounding residential communities.
- 3d. Use green streets design principles.** Streets will use vegetated facilities to manage stormwater runoff at its source and create a sustainable stormwater strategy that exceeds regulatory compliance and resource protection goals.
- 3e. Implement rigorous stormwater management.** Surface water will be managed by detention, infiltration, retention, reuse, and low impact development techniques used during redevelopment.
- 3f. Set aggressive goals for automobile independence.** The goal is to reduce vehicle miles traveled per resident of Tysons to below the regional average.

4. Create an Authority for Implementation that Provides the Flexibility, Accountability, and Resources Necessary to Achieve the Vision

Policy Changes Required

- Improve the means of evaluating zoning changes to bring speed, clarity and predictability to the process.
- Develop new tools and mechanisms to finance infrastructure improvements and public amenities.

Specific Recommendations

Create a new implementing authority. The authority will be established by the Board of Supervisors to be the “Keeper of the Vision” and ensure that the overarching goals and objectives of the new Comprehensive Plan are implemented.

Powers and responsibilities of the implementing authority should include:

- Work with Fairfax County to develop new Zoning Ordinance language and categories to address the unique requirements of this urban downtown.
- Work with Fairfax County to develop new urban standards for determining appropriate infrastructure needs.
- Develop and enforce a set of design guidelines to reflect the “vision” and to supplement the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance as necessary to further define the new urban “downtown”.
- Research and develop, on an annual basis, a list of priorities and appropriate phasing to ensure that necessary infrastructure and public amenities will support development and accommodate Plan recommendations.
- Participate in the zoning process through design review to insure that applications are integrated with surrounding properties, and are in accordance with the design guidelines, the Comprehensive Plan and zoning before being submitted to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.
- Continuously monitor and review the plans, zoning codes and development progress and recommend any changes as necessary.
- Plan and implement initiatives that complement and supplement those of the county in order to enhance the quality of life in Tysons. These initiatives may include:
 - Common elements like schools, parks, libraries, and other public facilities
 - Transportation enhancements such as the construction and operation of circulators and other transit not provided entirely by government
 - Improving streetscapes through landscaping, sidewalks, lighting and street furniture
 - Supporting infrastructure improvements
 - Enhancing public safety with security staff, organizing public watch and information programs, and security cameras
 - Enhancing the physical environment with programs to control litter and graffiti and maintaining common landscapes
 - Providing cultural and recreational activities.

- Raise and expend funds for all of the types of improvements and initiatives to be carried out by the authority. Funding mechanisms to be created and used by the authority could include:
 - Tax Increment Financing
 - County, State & Federal funding
 - Improvement Districts.
 - Additional capital development authorities
 - Public-private partnerships
 - Transfer of Development Rights/Air Rights
 - Pro-rata contributions by landowners
 - Other forms of borrowing and grants
 - Tax abatements/incentives
 - Density incentives.